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Facing Backward: Keeping Kids Safe In Cars

by RUSSELL LEWIS

NPR Morning Edition Report, December 10, 2010

The leading cause of death for toddlers in the United States isn't poisoning, medical ailments or accidents around the home. By far the biggest killer of children is car crashes.

On Thursday, the National Transportation Safety Board holds a forum on car seat safety in Washington. Some of the recommendations could mean wholesale changes to how Americans transport their kids.

Alexandria Paige pulls her car into a parking garage in Birmingham, Ala. But she isn't looking for a spot. She's in search of the car seat installation team from Children's Hospital of Alabama.

"What we're going to do is get your little sweet pea out and I'm just gonna make sure that we have the harness straps in the car seat in the correct position before we get started," says Julie Farmer of the hospital's Child Passenger Safety Resource Center.

Farmer pokes her head into the back seat and finds Paige's 9-month-old son, Peyton, decked out in a Buzz Lightyear jacket. Paige needs a new car seat installed and is excited to finally have her son's rear-facing seat flipped around so she can see him.

"I've seen in other cars babies his age," Paige says. "I've seen them front-facing so I just always thought, 'OK, once he comes out of the infant seat, he faces [frontward].'"

Requirements For Rear-Facing Seats

She must wait a few months, though. Alabama, like most states, requires rear-facing car seats be used until toddlers weigh 20 pounds and are at least a year old. Farmer tells Paige that's just a minimum.

"The best choice is for you to keep your child rear-facing as long as possible ... not only because of the law, but because, well, of the law of gravity, I guess you could say," Farmer says.

The reason is simple physics. In a head-on collision, a rear-facing car seat spreads the energy of the crash across the toddler's entire back, not just across a narrow portion of a tiny body.

Studies have shown that toddlers in a rear-facing car seat are five times safer than those who face forward. In the U.S., five children a day die, on average, in car crashes. That's frustrating to pediatricians.

"I think we've become immune to this," says Ben Hoffman, a professor of pediatrics at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine. "I think it happens so frequently and with such regularity that we've lost focus on how important it is. And I think that we're so reliant on cars to get us from Point A to Point B that we've sort of accepted it as the price of doing business. "

Hoffman, who directs UNM's residency training program, is also a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. For a couple of years the academy has wrestled with extending the requirements for how long children should be required to sit facing the rear in vehicles.



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Rule: 23.3.418

[Prev](#) [Up](#) [Next](#)

Rule Title: STANDARDS FOR CHILD SAFETY RESTRAINT SYSTEMS

Department: JUSTICE, DEPARTMENT OF
 Chapter: MOTOR VEHICLE DIVISION
 Subchapter: Traffic

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Latest version of the adopted rule presented in Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM):

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23.3.418 STANDARDS FOR CHILD SAFETY RESTRAINT SYSTEMS

All child safety restraint systems purchased after January 1, 1984, for use in motor vehicles to comply with the provisions of sections 61-9-419 through 61-9-423, MCA, must conform to federal standards outlined in Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 213. The Division of Motor Vehicles, Department of Justice, hereby adopts and incorporates by reference Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 213, in 49 C.F.R. part 571, which sets forth requirements and standards for child safety restraint systems. A copy of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 213, in 49 C.F.R. part 571 may be obtained from the Division of Motor Vehicles, Department of Justice, 303 Roberts, Helena, Montana 59620.

History: Sec. 61-9-420, MCA; IMP, 61-9-419 to 61-9-423, MCA; NEW, 1984 MAR p. 1040, Eff. 7/13/84.

Effective rule versions existed in ARM on or after March 31, 2007

MAR Notices	Effective From	Effective To	History Notes
	7/13/1984	Current	History: Sec. <u>61-9-420</u> , MCA; <u>IMP</u> , <u>61-9-419</u> to <u>61-9-423</u> , MCA; <u>NEW</u> , 1984 MAR p. 1040, Eff. 7/13/84.

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For questions about the organization of the ARM or this web site, contact sosarm@mt.gov.

Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 213

Highlights of the Regulation for Child Restraint Systems

- Covers all types of systems (infant carriers, child seats, harnesses, and car beds) that restrain children under 65 pounds in motor vehicles.
- Requires that child restraint systems pass a 30 mph frontal sled test, which simulates a crash.
- Specifies maximum rotation during crash test for rear-facing child restraints.
- Specifies limits on child dummy measurements for forward-facing child restraints:
 - Head injury criteria (potential brain injury resulting from abrupt deceleration)
 - Head excursion (distance dummy head travels forward)
 - Force on chest
 - Knee excursion
- Requires that restraints not break during dynamic tests.
- Requires that child restraints retain a child dummy within the confines of the restraint during crash tests.
- Specifies padding requirements around the head of child restraints for use by children weighing 22 pounds or less. Flame-retardant fabric required.
- Requires that safety seats pass the 30 mph test secured with vehicle lap belt or lower LATCH attachments only as well as a more stringent test for forward-facing restraints with a tether anchored. Exceptions: child harnesses and products for children with special needs may be tested with top tether straps anchored. Boosters are tested with a vehicle lap-shoulder belt.
- Specifies the amount of force needed to open buckles on child restraints, so that toddlers cannot unbuckle themselves but adults can easily open the buckle. (Before crash test, minimum force is nine lbs. and maximum is 14 lbs.; after crash test, maximum is 16 lbs.)
- Requires permanent, visible labels on the restraint with the following information: certification that it conforms to standards for use in motor vehicles, basic instructions for correct installation, name and address of manufacturer/distributor, and date made. Air bag warning label required for rear-facing restraints. The restraint must have a designated location for storing the instruction booklet or sheet. An additional label may be present to state certification for use in aircraft.
- Permits child restraint systems to be designed as an integral part of motor vehicle seats.
- Requires that the manufacturer include a registration card with the child restraint and notify consumers of product recalls.
- As of September 1, 2002, child restraints and vehicle were required to provide LATCH attachments (FMVSS 213) and anchors (FMVSS 225). Refer to Learning About LATCH on Page D-3 in this manual.

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